



D17 Sexual Assaults in Geneva, Switzerland: 2006-2010

Romano La Harpe, MD, Institut de Médecine Légale, 9 Av de Champel (CMU), Geneva, 1206, SWITZERLAND; and Anne-Thérèse Vlastos, MP, Département de Gynécologie et Obstétrique, 30 bd de la Cluse, Geneva, 1206, SWITZERLAND*

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the incidence and the prevalence of the sexual assaults of female victims in Geneva in the last years, including the reasons which encourage formal complaint. Results of toxicological analyses performed on victims of sexual assaults are also presented.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by explaining the necessity of collaboration between the gynecologist and the forensic pathologist with the utilization of a kit. Finally, this study looked at socio-demographic characteristics of the victims of sexual assaults such as age, site of offense, marital status, numbers of offenders, time of offense, and time from the offense until the examination.

The number of women who visit the Maternity of Geneva, the hospital which is a part of the department of Gynecology and Obstetrics at the Faculty of medicine of Geneva, for sexual assault cases has been increasing in recent years from about 20 cases per year in the late 1990s to about 100 cases per year in the years leading up to 2010. For this reason, a protocol was established so that all victims of sexual assault are supported in the same way, no matter when they may arrive.

In Switzerland, since April 1, 2004, rape or forceful sexual relations among spouses is considered in the same way as with strangers, and it is prosecuted automatically and not just treated as a complaint. The incurred penalty is a maximum of 10 years, if no other aggravating factors are involved, such as the use of weapons or the jeopardizing of the life of the victim. The women who consult medical professionals after a sexual assault do so primarily for therapeutic purposes, that is to say, to rapidly receive care (disinfections of wounds, etc.), to detect and treat sexually transmitted diseases, including hepatitis and the HIV virus, and to detect a possible pregnancy (emergency contraception). Victims also seek relief for psychological trauma, where they are heard and understood. If the psychic trauma is sufficiently affected, a psychiatrist sees the patient in the emergency department or room and decides whether she should be hospitalized or not. In other cases, the victim is sent for a consultation at the Interdisciplinary Medicine and Prevention of Violence unit the next day, where doctors and psychologists coordinate and take the necessary steps to care for the victim.

In Geneva (450,000 inhabitants), all female victims of sexual assaults who undergo a medical examination are examined by both a gynecologist and a forensic pathologist, even if the victim has not formally made a complaint. Indeed, different situations are imaginable. A victim can arrive with the police after they file a complaint. The victim can also depose a complaint after the medical examination. The third possibility is that the victim waives a complaint. In this instance, respect for medical confidentiality is maintained and prosecutorial action is not taken.

The role of the forensic pathologist is to perform a complete examination of all lesions observed on the body and to ensure that all necessary specimens are taken in case of a complaint, or in the case the victim changes her mind and makes a complaint in the future. A certificate, with all the findings, is systematically given to the victim ten days afterwards.

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